

Our Kids

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News For Southern
Region Families

“House of Pride” works with teens inside-out

Foster parent Annie Ratliff describes her house as the “House of Pride.” Her goal is to teach her children to have pride, endurance, determination and personal spiritual convictions. She thinks that her method is paying off.

Annie has a house full of teens. She is proud of all of them and is quick to list their strengths and accomplishments. She glows as she talks about her foster son who had a serious absenteeism problem before he was placed in her home. “He was a grade level behind, because he had missed so much school. Last year he didn’t miss a day and was on the Honor Roll. Watching him walk across the stage to receive his honors was a day that won’t be forgotten.”

Other youth that have been placed with Annie are participating in sports. “I have one teen that plays every sport offered at school!” she said proudly. “He also is in the Youth Choir and the Church drill team. He has a full schedule all the time.”

Annie has become quite the expert in helping teens prepare for independence. She helps them

prepare by insisting they have an education and enhancing their strengths.

Her foster son Van, who is now 18, will be graduating next year. “He has made very good grades and I am encouraging him to attend a local college.” She has also worked with a teen mom to assure that she has the skills to parent, when she is out on her own.

Annie feels her “House of Pride” is paying off. The accomplishments of the teens placed in her home are a reflection of the commitment and dedication she has to the teens that have become a part of her family. She is happy to share their success with those who assist her on a daily basis. Her supports include her mother, who is grandma to the kids and her church family, who is always there for love and support.



Annie Ratliff

Valda L. Haywood named Assistant Regional Administrator

The Southern Region Staff is pleased to have Valda Haywood in this most vital position within the region. Her responsibilities include oversight

for direct service and child protection functions at offices in the East St. Louis area. Valda was the supervisor of the Southern Region AP Team just prior to this promotion. She is looking forward to working with families in this new role and can be reached at 618-583-2117.



Valda Haywood

Haywood received her bachelor’s degree from the University of Illinois and her MSW from Washington University. She has been a member of the DCFS team for 20 years. She began her career as a DCP Investigator. She has been employed as a Child Welfare Worker, APT Contract Monitor, Court Liaison, Child Welfare Lead Worker and Supervisor. Haywood’s caring for children, high work standards and dedication to the Department were only a few of the determining factors in her receiving this position.

Meet me in St. Louis

It got hot and hotter, but a hot St. Louis summer couldn't stop the spirit of the Belleville Foster Parent Association. Since the late 80s this group of dedicated foster/adoptive parents have manned a booth at Fair St. Louis to raise funds to support group activities.

Each year Gary Trentman, president of the Belleville Foster Parent Association coordinates the effort. He recruits foster/adoptive parent volunteers, their adult children and former foster children, who are now adults to staff the booth. The booth sells food and beverages that are always popular with the fair crowd.

Three hot, 16-hour days in July are quite a test of endurance. But the hearty folks from the Belleville Foster Parent Association, think of the rewards, as they stand in the sweltering heat. In the fall, the kids will be able to go to Six Flags, and the Christmas party gets bigger and better each year. The money earned is all used for special events for foster families.



Local help with Individualized Education Plans

Both state and federal laws and regulations governing the administration of educational programs for students with disabilities have recognized the important role of parents in the special education process. DCFS Southern Region educational advisors Bessie Peabody and Kendra Homoya have designed a workshop on "Everything You Need to Know About an IEP" (Individualized Education Plan).

Below are helpful hints for an IEP Meeting:

1. A child's program and placement are determined only after the Individualized Educational Plan is developed, and can only be based on the needs of the child. A change of services or placement can be made only by the staffing team, which includes the foster parents. It cannot be done solely by school administration.
2. The IEP meeting must be at a time and place agreed upon by the caregivers and school administration.
3. Foster parents are equal participants in developing, reviewing and revising the child's IEP. It is important for foster parents to take time to make the effort to become informed, effective members of the staffing team.
4. Foster parents have the right and responsibility to read and understand the IEP and to ask if they don't understand.
5. Foster parents should make sure they have a copy of the entire IEP for their records.
6. Foster parents can set process review dates with their child's teacher and follow through keeping the lines of communication open. They should receive a "report card" as often as everyone does.
7. Foster parents may ask for an evaluation whenever they feel it is necessary.
8. Foster parents may request a staffing at any time if they believe the IEP needs to be changed in order to best meet the child's needs.

A child with a disability is a child, first and foremost. He should be provided with the same opportunities for healthy childhood development that other children have. The IEP can and should address these critical needs of the child. Caregivers with questions can call educational advisors Bessie Peabody at 618-583-2125 or Kendra Homoya at 618-687-1733.

Region youth win 2 DCFS scholarships

The 2004 DCFS Scholarship recipients are now adjusting to campus life. The scholarship covers tuition and academic costs at any of the nine participating Illinois state institutions, and provides a monthly stipend of \$445 and a medical card for up to four years. These students were selected from among more than 250 applicants.

Alicia Miller

Alicia Miller, of Centralia, graduated from Centralia High School in 2003. She is currently a student at Kaskaskia College. Alicia plans to major in psychology and go on to medical school for a degree in psychiatry. In high school, she participated in band, art club, student council, business club, and science club. Major academic awards she received included Illinois State Scholar, Scholastic Achievement Award, and Scholar Performer Award. She was ranked 9th in her class of 261. Alicia also was employed at Peebles Department Store.

Joshua Melvin

Joshua Melvin, of Fairview Heights, is a 2004 graduate of Belleville East High School where he earned Honor Roll and Student of the Month recognition. In high school Joshua volunteered as a Guidance Office worker. He previously worked at Taco Bell, Imo's, the Belleville News Democrat and Schnucks. Now Joshua is studying at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville.

DCFS Operations Exec explains local cuts with other supports in place

To our foster parents in the Southern Region:

The Illinois Legislature reduced the DCFS annual budget by \$77 million recently. All levels within our agency were asked to work smarter and more focused at the "essentials only" level of delivery. This resulted in cuts in some contracts. Since our population of children in care has fallen below 19,000 we have realigned our energies and resources to focus on quality instead of quantity. One difficult, but necessary, cut was to reduce the level of Foster Parent Support Specialists. These individuals work with families in DCFS-supervised foster homes.

The foster parent support specialist role will continue in the regions. Coverage is being realigned and some activities are being eliminated or shifted to other areas of the department. These changes will allow the remaining foster parent support specialists to focus on homes in which our children and youth are placed.

If you have questions about these changes or are unsure who your assigned foster parent support specialist is please call on the Lead Support Specialist in your region:

East St. Louis Area

Jackie Price, 618-628-4444

Marion Area

Judie Fairchild, 618-982-9543

Effingham Area

Vickie Klein, 618-245-3394

Many other support programs for foster parents remain in place. DCFS will continue with the Foster Parent training modules required for re-licensing and available to new licensing applicants for skill building. New course offerings are underway (see article on page 8). Caregivers can also participate in the regional advisory councils and the State-wide Foster Care Advisory Council. Additionally, the information shared in this periodical serves to inform caregivers of significant events, program changes and resource information. Finally, caregivers will of course continue to receive active support from the caseworkers assigned to the children in their homes. If you are experiencing problems that are not being addressed by your caseworker please contact the supervisor or manager for assistance.

Although fostering children will continue to challenge many homes and communities, DCFS will continue to provide supports to both. In the year ahead, we are committed to providing even more developmental services to foster homes throughout the state. We highly value our caregivers and will not lose sight of your immeasurable contribution to the children and families we all serve.

Sincerely,

Arthur Bishop

DCFS Deputy Director for Operations

New trainings coming on asthma, sexual behavior problems and policy updates

The schedules for in-service training had to be put on hold due to the state budget delays. However, the Office of Training stayed busy developing new offerings for caregivers. Look for updated schedules in the next issue of the newsletter or contact the DCFS training college.

Asthma training

This new foster parent in-service training on caring for children with Asthma is based on training initially developed by the Office of the Inspector General for child welfare staff. Asthma is a chronic disease that affects many children and requires environmental and medical management by caregivers. It is the most common chronic illness in children, the leading cause of school absenteeism and is the third leading cause of hospitalization in children under age 15. It is estimated that between 12% and 25% of wards have Asthma. The two and one-half hour in-service training will address the implications of caring for children with Asthma.

Understanding and Working with Children with Sexual Behavior Problems

This two-day training which was developed at the request of caregivers will be provided in a team setting and introduce sweeping

new changes in philosophy, policy and service delivery when supporting children with sexual behavior problems. Review and feedback of the curriculum by foster parents and the High End SBP Committee has already been completed. Plans for additional review of the curriculum are being made. A pilot training may be scheduled for this winter.

Updated information from DCFS

The new in-service training module will focus on keeping caregivers informed of new programs, initiatives and changes to DCFS Rule and Procedure. The module will be updated frequently. The classroom time required to complete this module has not been determined yet. This training was piloted at the DCFS Cook North region earlier this year. The content includes:

- Identifying how foster parents support achieving desired outcomes for children in their care
- Applying specific behaviors and actions that are included in the PRIDE competencies toward achieving permanency
- Introducing the Illinois Model of Integrated Assessment and the changes it brings to child welfare practice
- Connecting the results of the Integrated Assessment to the

process for developing a comprehensive Family Service Plan

- Identifying changes in child welfare practice associated with the Client Service Planning Process

For more information on courses or scheduling, contact the Training Coordinator listed below:

- **Marion Area**
618-536-7751
- **East St. Louis Area**
618-650-3213

OUR KIDS

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Call with foster parent association news and schedules; local training; features on foster families and community members working for children; photos; and news articles and support all foster families can use.